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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide information concerning the dimensions of perceived student rights, which were defined as policies on student behavior in the development and implementation of which students may petition to participate. A 54-item attitude instrument was designed to include controversial statements gleaned from the literature and previous research. The respondent was asked to agree or disagree with each statement on a nine point scale. The instrument was distributed to 800 students at 4 geographically distant universities; 497 or 62% completed and returned the attitude scale. A principal components factor analysis using unity in the diagonal was conducted. The 5 factor solution included: the right of the student to... I: make personal and social decisions; II: redress of grievances; III: participate in institutional policy making; IV: privacy of personal information; and V: freedom of choice in selecting academic courses and organizational membership. These factors accounted respectively for 49, 17, 13, 9, and 8 percent of the common variance, for a total of 96%. Thus the dimensionality of perceived student rights for the sample was established. (AF)

A FACTOR ANALYTICALLY DEVELOPED STUDENT RIGHTS ATTITUDE SCALE

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an observable resurgence in college student demands for more rights and freedoms in recent years. In comparison to the 1950's, there has been a marked increase in overt expressions by current students regarding social issues and student rights, both on and off the campus.

Until recent times college administrators viewed their relationships with students to be in loco parentis. This concept generally was interpreted to mean that the college had an obligation to act in behalf of, or in the absence of, parents. During the first half of the twentieth century, however, there was little direct challenge to institutional authority to establish rules and regulations governing student behavior and activities. Nonetheless, by the late 1960's the challenge to authority and the conflict between generations had reached unprecedented levels.

Thus, campus unrest has become a fact in our time, while the issue of student rights has become one of the major academic controversies. Hence, the identification of perceived student rights is the first step toward understanding the variance in attitude between and within groups on these issues. It is, therefore, hypothesized that perceived student rights can be identified and measured.

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METHOD

Student rights are defined in this investigation as policies on student behavior in the development and implementation of which students may petition to participate. A fifty-four item attitude instrument was designed to include controversial statements gleaned from the literature and previous research. Each statement of a right was defined as simply and concisely as possible. The respondent was asked to agree or disagree with each statement on a nine point scale. The statements and scale which follow are samples of those included in this instrument:

(a) Students have the right to determine what "closing hours" in women's living units will be.

(b) Students have the right to call witnesses on their behalf in disciplinary hearings.

Scale: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
Disagree ..... No .....Agree
Strongly Opinion Strongly

Fifteen professionally trained student personnel staff members employed at Kent State University, were asked to judge the comprehensiveness of the instrument as well as the validity of each item. This instrument was designed, therefore, to accurately represent current proposed student rights and comprehensive coverage of the major items under question.

This instrument was then administered to a sample of 200 students at each of four geographically distant universities: Mankato State College, University of Mississippi, University of Oregon, and the University of Vermont. The sampling was a stratified random procedure which produced a representative sample classified by sex, class rank, and college.

A copy of the attitude scale, an instructions-information sheet, and an answer form were distributed by mail to each subject. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was enclosed for each student for returning the information and answer sheets to the institution from which they were mailed. The project coordinator at each institution forwarded responses to the writer.

The means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions of responses were computed for each of the 54 statements; then product-moment correlations were computed between each pair of the 54 items. The correlation matrix was factor analyzed by the principal components method using unity in the diagonal. All factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were rotated to the varimax criterion.

RESULTS

Of the total 800 undergraduate students selected for study, 497 or 62% completed and returned the attitude scale. The University of Vermont had the best return of 77%. The University of Mississippi had the poorest return of 51%.

The 5-factor solution was interpreted as follows. Factor I, Personal and Social, emphasized dormitory visitation, dress standards, dormitory closing hours, student code of behavior, off-campus living, use of alcohol on campus, class attendance, and others. This factor accounted for 49 per cent of the common variance.

Factor II, Redress of Grievances, placed an emphasis upon issues of due process in disciplinary matters; i.e., witnesses, hearings, notice of charges, lawyers and others. This factor accounted for 17 per cent of the common variance.

The items with high loadings on Factor III, Participation In Institutional Policy-making, relate to student membership on university committees or to participation in determining classroom teaching procedures. This factor accounted for 13 per cent of the common variance.

Factor IV, Privacy of Personal Information, consisted of only two items, both items having loadings above .700 and dealt with information about their personal disciplinary records and official university transcript. This factor accounted for 9 per cent of the common variance.

Factor V, Choice of Academic Courses and Organizational Membership, deals with an individual's freedom of choice in these areas. This factor accounted for 8 per cent of the common variance. Consequently, these five factors accounted for 96 per cent of the common variance.

DISCUSSION

The 5-factors which the analysis produced support the hypothesis that perceived student rights can be identified and measured. The principal-components factor analysis produced factors which also support a semantic model for writing items, which is presently being developed by Planisek. In general, the categories- personal, group, and legalistic- provide a basis for developing independent student right factors.

Although the total sample was large, 497 students, the return was a low 62 per cent. In addition to this sampling limitation, this investigation dealt with a controversial issue; therefore, the reliability of attitudes associated with a highly emotional topic must remain suspect. Also, it is difficult to establish the definition of a student right, since what one person considers a right someone else will view as a privilege.

Insert Table 1 about here

Because of the general symmetry of the scale distributions on each item, Pearson r's were used for the input matrix to the factor analysis. Also, the nine point scale was found to be appropriate for the population sampled based upon these scale distributions.

More than 65 per cent of the items or statements were tests of a single factor, i.e., for loadings .30 or greater. Most items which loaded on more than one factor may be explained in terms of the confusion resulting from the definition of a student right as discussed above (Refer to Table 1). The size of the loadings and their pattern made interpretation follow directly from the item content within each factor. Thus, naming the factors was not difficult.

Hence, five independent dimensions representing general areas of student rights are identifiable. Factor scores can now be computed for each individual on each factor, thereby making it possible for college administrators to locate sources of conflict between and among groups.

SUMMARY

The increase in overt expression by students advocating more rights and freedoms has become a source of campus unrest. Hence, if the specific sources of difference can be established between and among groups, then action can be taken to establish communication where necessary. The purpose of this study was to provide information concerning the dimensions of perceived student rights.

The sample of 497 students from four universities was administered a 54 item attitude instrument. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with each statement on a nine point scale. A principal components factor analysis using unity in the diagonal was conducted

The five factor solution was as follows: The Right of the Student to...I, Make Personal and Social Decisions; II, Redress of Grievances;

III, Participate in Institutional Policy-making; IV, Privacy of Personal Information; and V, Freedom of Choice in Selecting Academic Courses and Organizational Membership. Thus, the dimensionality of perceived student rights for the sample was established.

TABLE I

Varimax Rotated Factor Pattern For Principal Components Analysis: Loadings >.30

Item No.	Factor I	II	III	IV	V
1	.662				
2	.439				
3	.641				
4					.445
5	.537				
6	.328	.417			
7	.772				
8					.411
9	.331		.419		
10		.684			
11		.465	.325		
12	.671				
13			.501		
14		.466			
15	.578		.394		
16	.399	.391	.395		
17		.443			
18	.488	.277			
19	.574		.336		
20		.617			
21	.547		.344		
22	.321				.427
23				.716	
24	.600				
25	.369				.358
26		.657			
27		.415			
28	.378		.467		
29	.335	.317			
30	.333	.359			
31					
32	.660				
33	.715				
34				.757	
35	.761				
36	.792				
37	.314		.521		
38	.332		.503		
39	.561				
40	.557				
41	.776				
42	.703				
43	.531				

Item No.	Factors				
	I	II	III	IV	V
44	.328	.338			
45	.496			.361	
46	.344		.316		
47					.461
48	.359	.385			
49			.500		
50	.392				
51	.524				
52					
53					
54	.715				

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